

the gossip. But that is the way it works. So we all will continue to make it work that way.

Mr. President, as you can tell, I have used this opportunity to share some of the concerns and interests that I have having to do with national parks, having to do with allowing the private sector to participate in many of the things that are commercial in nature in the Government; talking about what I think is a more efficient manner of handling our budget on a 2-year budget cycle, and using the other year to have oversight to ensure those dollars are being spent in the best way they can.

They complain a little bit, I guess, which is OK, all of us do it, about the lack of ability to really portray and get out into the public the real issues and the real controversies. That is what we are really about here—is talking about different views and different directions. And to the extent that all of us can participate in making those decisions through the political process, which is how we govern ourselves, then it's important, I think—vital—to have that information available.

#### THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business Friday, April 24, 1998, the federal debt stood at \$5,505,293,755,428.21 (Five trillion, five hundred five billion, two hundred ninety-three million, seven hundred fifty-five thousand, four hundred twenty-eight dollars and twenty-one cents).

One year ago, April 24, 1997, the federal debt stood at \$5,343,217,000,000 (Five trillion, three hundred forty-three billion, two hundred seventeen million).

Twenty-five years ago, April 24, 1973, the federal debt stood at \$455,284,000,000 (Four hundred fifty-five billion, two hundred eighty-four million) which reflects a debt increase of more than \$5 trillion—\$5,050,009,755,428.21 (Five trillion, fifty billion, nine million, seven hundred fifty-five thousand, four hundred twenty-eight dollars and twenty-one cents) during the past 25 years.

#### THE MISSOURI RIVER ENERGY SERVICES

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, today I would like to share with my colleagues a development that is occurring in my region with an organization that has long been an agent of change. The Missouri Basin Municipal Power Agency is a joint action agency that provides affordable electricity, through its 58 municipal utility members, to over 200,000 consumers in my home state of South Dakota, and to citizens of North Dakota, Minnesota and Iowa.

The agency was formed in 1960 to coordinate municipalities' efforts to negotiate the purchase of power and energy from the Federal government. In 1970, the Federal government informed public power systems in the region that their growing power supply needs

could no longer be met through the Federal hydropower program. Missouri Basin stepped in and met the supplemental power supply of its member communities by participating in, among other arrangements, the Laramie River Station coal-fired plant, one of the cleanest coal plants in the country.

Over the years, the agency has played a vital role in meeting the energy needs of the region. The agency has promoted integrated resource planning, carried out an aggressive tree planting program, and continued to provide its customers with affordable, reliable electricity.

Faced with a changing electricity market, Missouri Basin this month changed its name to Missouri River Energy Services, signaling its readiness to embrace a new era in which utilities will provide many added services and benefits for their customers. Missouri River Energy Services is rising to meet this challenge admirably.

I appreciate the work Missouri River Energy Services has done for our communities and wish the agency the best of luck as it helps forge the future of the electricity industry.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. THOMAS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

#### EXECUTIVE SESSION

#### PROTOCOLS TO THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY OF 1949 ON ACCESSION OF POLAND, HUNGARY, AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now go into executive session and proceed to the consideration of Executive Calendar No. 16, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Treaty Document No. 105-36, Protocols to the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949 on the Accession of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic.

The Senate resumed consideration of the treaty.

Mr. HELMS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, prior to the Easter recess, there was some rather spirited discussion on the question of NATO expansion, and the debate so

far has shown, I believe, that most Senators are reaching the correct conclusion that bringing Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic into the NATO alliance is the right thing to do.

To be sure, there are some commentators who vow they know more than all the rest of us and who make a living on the talk shows and in newspaper op-ed pages, and they have been wringing their hands declaring how awful it is that the U.S. Senate is not taking this vital foreign policy issue seriously. How awful, they lament, it is that the Senate is not paying adequate attention to this important issue.

Sometimes when I hear comments completely off the wall like that, I am tempted to say to these know-it-alls, "Heal thyselfes." In fact, most of them have ignored the debate that the Senate has been having for months on this issue, and most of the commentators have been following something else, maybe an intern at the White House, or whatever. If they had been paying attention, they would have known why the Senate today appears to have reached a broad consensus as to the wisdom of NATO expansion and they would not be confusing that consensus with the lack of serious discussion and debate.

The fact is, Mr. President, we have been working with the administration leaders for 9 straight months now to fix their original approach to the NATO expansion. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate NATO observer group have made concerted efforts to address the contentious issue early on precisely to ensure that the major problems with NATO expansion were addressed by the time 12 noon today arrived and we reached the Senate floor with this proposal.

Last fall, when we began the Foreign Relations Committee's extensive hearings on NATO expansion, I gave the administration a clear warning emphasizing that there was a right way and a wrong way to expand NATO and that, in my view, and in the view of many Senators, the administration was doing it the wrong way.

Some may recall that when Secretary Albright first came to testify before the Foreign Relations Committee, I told that fine lady that while I wanted to be helpful to her in achieving Senate ratification of NATO expansion, it was essential that we work together to fix what was wrong with the administration's approach and make sure it was done the right way. During the ensuing months, that is precisely what we have done.

We have held eight—count them—eight separate hearings in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to discuss and debate every aspect of the administration's plan for NATO expansion. We heard from 38 different witnesses, who testified at some length each, and we produced a hearing transcript that is 552 printed pages long.

In the Foreign Relations Committee, we had worked with Secretary Albright